



We All Have Mental Health

a part of the
FAMILY WORKBOOK SERIES
on
Mental Health & Depression



www.ErikasLighthouse.org

Erika's Lighthouse is a not-for-profit dedicated to educating and raising awareness about adolescent depression, encouraging good mental health and breaking down the stigma surrounding mental health issues.

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Erika's Lighthouse Family Workbook One: We All Have Mental Health

Welcome to the Erika's Lighthouse Family Workbook: We All Have Mental Health. This workbook is designed to give families information and exercises to talk about and practice good mental health at home. It can be used on its own, and is also a great companion to our Erika's Lighthouse Level I: We All Have Mental Health classroom education program that your child may receive at school.



In this workbook, we're going to talk about mental health and what having good mental health means. We're going to help you begin a conversation around mental health and share with you how mental health can impact your children. We'll learn about the basics of good mental health and what might get in the way of good mental health. We'll also discuss the importance of resiliency and why it's important for good mental health.

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This workbook is based on the experiences of families experiencing childhood and teenage depression. It was written for families who are in similar situations. While Erika's Lighthouse consulted with clinical, therapeutic, legal and child development experts when developing this material, it makes no representations about the medical or psychological opinions expressed herein, nor does it accept responsibility for any actions taken as a result of the material or information contained in the workbook. Every child and family's situation is unique, and Erika's Lighthouse urges families to seek and find competent professional advice tailored to their own family's situation.

What is Mental Health?

Mental health is about our feelings, thoughts, emotions and moods. Mental health is the foundation of a happy, healthy and productive life. Achieving and maintaining good mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood through adulthood. We know that teaching our children about mental health will help them focus in school, maintain relationships with those they care about and better overcome the obstacles they find in life. In short, it will help them be well and stay well.

What gets in the way of mental health?



Truthfully, unmanaged stress is often what stands in the way of good mental health. Stress is a normal part of life. It serves a purpose by motivating us to get things done and do our best. But when we have too much stress, it can cause problems in our minds and our bodies. When we have too much stress, we might have physical symptoms like headaches or stomach aches, and too much stress can also lead to mental health problems like anxiety or depression. When we think about stress, the important question to ask is how we handle it and what we can do to alleviate it. The same is true for our children.

Stress can come from a variety of different places. For adults, it can come from money problems, relationship issues, job insecurity. Children experience stress, too, often caused by academic pressure, family pressure or social pressures.

Risk Factors

There are some risk factors that can put people at higher risk for mental health concerns. Some of these factors for children include poverty, family conflict, health, social rejection, major transitions or changes, learning disabilities, trauma or neglect, tragedy or loss of a loved one.

Protective Factors and Resiliency

We know there are things that we can do to support children during difficult times. Think about this well-known saying: the road to success is often bumpy. What does that mean? It means that all of us will experience challenges and roadblocks in our life, but if we can view these bumpy times as learning opportunities, and overcome those obstacles, it allows us to grow and become resilient.

We all want our children to lead happy, healthy and productive lives. We want them to have the skills that they need to deal with life's challenges. According to research, resiliency is the most important characteristic that a person can possess to help overcome challenges, so when we think about risk factors and we think about resiliency, the key is balance. The more risk factors the child has; the more protective factors are needed to be resilient.



The good news is that there is a lot we can do to build protective factors and help our children **Build Resilience** . Simply reassuring our kids by telling them we believe in them, and that they can also believe

in themselves helps build resiliency skills and leads to hopefulness and optimism. We want our kids to be flexible and think accurately, which leads to their own emotional awareness and control. Talking to them about how they are feeling and praising them when they show emotional awareness and control reinforces those behaviors. Being positive, being their cheerleader, rooting them on, saying I'm here for you, I believe in you are all ways we can help our kids become more resilient in the face of life's challenges. Helping them problem-solve these challenges models for them how to solve problems on their own in the future. Learn more about how to promote [Resiliency, Hopefulness & Happiness](#)  in your child.

Understanding Feelings

One of the ways we can help our kids become more emotionally aware is to talk to them about the feelings they may be having. We know that children experience a range of feelings and we want them to be able to express those feelings in healthy ways. Feelings can be big or small and everything in between. At Erika's Lighthouse, we talk about feelings as "everyday feelings" and "overwhelming feelings." Some examples of everyday feelings may be happiness, joy or disappointment. Examples of overwhelming feelings may be loss, grief or despair. Almost any feeling can be an everyday feeling or an overwhelming feeling, it is recognizing when a specific feeling is too much, and not typical. Particular feelings like sadness, loss, grief or despair can be concerning if they last for more than a couple days or seem extreme.



Everyday Feelings

It's a normal part of daily life to feel happy, confident and carefree. It's also a normal part of daily life to feel down, angry or stressed. Both positive and negative emotions come and go based on what's happening around us and typically can be easily handled. These are everyday feelings. We can help our kids deal with their negative everyday feelings by reminding them that these feelings are a normal part of life. We can also help them move past their negative feelings by inviting them to do something they enjoy, like listening to music or playing with their pet. By helping our kids problem-solve ways to manage or get through their normal negative emotions, we are setting models for them that they will use throughout their lives.

Overwhelming Feelings

Sometimes our feelings get in the way of living life and when that happens, we call those feelings "overwhelming." Overwhelming feelings are more intense than everyday feelings, they hang around for a long time and change the way we feel, think and behave. They can stop us from doing what we want to. Sometimes overwhelming feelings are brought on because of things in our life, and sometimes they happen for no reason at all.

Parents, Families and Caregivers are the First to Know

Families are often the first to notice that something different is going on with their kids.

We can't tell how someone feels by just looking at them or what they share online. Our lives may look perfect even if in reality they aren't. Sometimes, under the surface are feelings of anxiety, worry, anger and stress. Kids, like adults, often keep these feelings to themselves, leading to thoughts swarming about in their heads, keeping them up at night or making them unable to concentrate.



If we're physically unwell, we let people know. It should be no different with mental health. Saying that we need help makes us feel much less alone. It feels good to talk to someone. While it can be hard to talk about these feelings, it can also remind us that friends, family and teachers are there to help, and can help us get the support we may need. We can also try writing, exercising or working out, playing music or doing art.

By talking to your child, you can ask them to identify whether their feelings are "everyday" or "overwhelming." You can just listen, with no pressure or judgment. You don't have to have an answer, and you can help your child find the help they need.

As we think about child development, it's important to have an understanding of what typical development looks like. Children in the ages of 6 to 12 want to please their friends, want to be like their friends, they're more likely to agree with

rules, they like to sing, dance and act, they start to show some independence like going to a next-door neighbor's house by themselves. Between the ages of 9 to 12, they become aware of the changes happening to their bodies as they're starting to go through puberty, they're very aware of what's happening to them versus what's happening to their friend, they begin to be able to distinguish between fantasy and reality.

They're also deeply aware and impacted by stigma. They want to be liked and please people, so they're very aware of anything that might make them stand out or make them different.

Stigma

Let's talk about stigma for a minute. Which of the following would you be comfortable telling someone you don't know very well?

- You like coffee.
- You like country music.
- You have diabetes.
- You have depression.

If you are like many, you probably answered the last one with, "I'm not sure," or "no." Why is that? Because depression and mental health issues have stigma attached to them. We don't want to admit or might be ashamed that we have them.

Eighty percent of the reason people don't seek help for mental health issues is because of stigma. This is true for adults, and it's true for kids, especially kids who already want to be like everyone else, and not stand out.

Stigma is when we are afraid people will judge us or think negatively about us. However, we say that we wouldn't be ashamed of seeking help if we had a physical health issue, so why should we be ashamed of seeking help for a mental health issue? We're trying to help alleviate the stigma so that we can make sure that kids know that it's okay to ask for help, just like they would go to a doctor if they broke their arm.

Setting a Supportive Environment

It's important that we create and foster a supportive environment that can encourage good mental health and normalize conversations about mental health. Think about how to be purposeful about your activities and start by having your own [Mental Health Week](#)  at home.

We can promote good mental health strategies like eating healthy and maintaining good nutrition. We can practice mindfulness every day before bedtime or in the morning or do a five-minute mindful moment. You can even start sending out passive positive messages, and add color to your home, by completing [Kindness Flowers](#) . We can make sure that we're getting enough sleep at night. Sleep is really important and it can sometimes be challenging in our busy lives, but we know that it makes a huge impact in terms of mental health. We can encourage exercise, taking a walk around the block, walking the dog, getting on a bike. We can even do it in the house - an obstacle course, ten jumping jacks and then five push-ups and an army crawl. Those are all ways to support good mental health.



Mental health
is like
physical health.
It takes effort
to stay healthy.



Good Mental Health Practices Kids Can Engage In

Getting your kids involved in good mental health activities can be fun and doesn't require a lot of work. Do your kids like to write or draw? Encourage your kids to journal, possibly by using our [Family Conversation Journal](#) . Writing down or drawing out their thoughts can help children explain how they're feeling and work through tough situations. As you engage in your own physical activity, invite your kids to join you in riding bikes, throwing a ball around, or playing a game of family tag. Indoors on a rainy or cold day? Play [Mental Health Bingo](#)  and see who gets 5 in a row.

You can encourage a wide-range of activities, techniques and practices. Many different [Positive Coping Mechanisms](#)  exist that offer a great way to encourage your child to be purposeful about good mental health.

Starting Conversations

If you are unsure how to start a conversation about mental health in your household, consider using one of our conversation starters. Using [How Do You Feel Today Emojis](#)  or a [Feeling Thermometer](#)  to check how your kids are feeling throughout the day can be a great way to start conversations. They can start out the morning by saying how they are feeling on the feeling thermometer – ready to go, happy, etc. When they get home from school,

they can say they are exhausted, had to really work hard at school or navigate social relationships, and they are at a 7. You can have a conversation with them about what they need right now to bring the level back down. Maybe it's a healthy snack, maybe it's a mindful moment. The feeling thermometer allows us to have a tool to open the conversation with our kids.



Managing Stress & Mental Distress

If your child's emotions or feelings are not in a good place, you can help them by offering a number of useful strategies and tips. By practicing mental health management strategies, your child can learn what works and helps them. Strategies like the [5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Technique](#) , [Mindfulness Jars](#) , or [Word Breathing](#) .

If those concerns extend or have extended over a period of time, you can be more proactive. Work with your child to develop a [Good Mental Health Plan](#) . You can also have them complete a [Managing Stress Worksheet](#) . You can help foster a good mental health environment by hanging a flier on your fridge or family calendar, like the [Five Ways to Boost Mental Health](#) .

Being A Trusted Adult

We want to help kids understand that if they are having “overwhelming feelings,” they should tell someone – a trusted adult. Maybe that's you, or maybe it's someone in your family, or at school, like a school counselor, teacher or coach, or in the community, like a religious leader. When we ask kids to tell us what they think a trusted adult is, they tell us that it is someone who's a good listener, who can offer advice, who can show empathy and be supportive, and who won't make them feel silly for coming to talk to them.

Setting up a supportive environment, normalizing conversations around mental health, and demonstrating to your child that you are there to support them will go a long way to building trust and confidence that they can come to you.

If you are concerned about your child, take action. You can learn more about helping them by reading the second workbook in this series [Concerned About Your Child](#) .

A child with just one trusted adult can reduce their suicide risk by 40%.

Take Care of Yourself

It's really important to remember to take care of yourself. You can't be available to your child if you don't take care of yourself, and modeling is the number one thing that we can do for our kids. It may not seem that they are watching and listening to us, but they are and how we take care of our mental health is a message that we're sending to them. Do the things that you enjoy. Maybe that's journaling, mindfulness, exercise, maybe it's cooking. Maybe you love to bake. Carving out time so that you feel like you're in a better space will also help support your kids.

Many of the good mental health strategies shared above can work for you as well, in particular, [Deep Breathing Exercises](#)  are incredibly beneficial to refocus our minds. It is also important to remember what we can and

cannot control. This can be difficult for families, especially when it involves our children, but is vital for our own mental health. Consider completing the **Circle of Control** [🔗](#) activity to remind yourself of our own capabilities and limitations.

Mental health is balance. It's the ability to manage our stress, to deal with our emotions and achieve our potential. Even small improvements in nutrition, sleep, exercise and coping strategies really can help us better manage stress and achieve mental health. Everyone deserves good mental health.

Additional Resources & Activities

You can learn more about good mental health and the difference between everyday feelings vs. overwhelming feelings by viewing our **Level I: We All Have Mental Health** [🔗](#) video.

Continue reading the **Family Workbook Series on Mental Health & Depression** with:

Two: Concerned About Your Child [🔗](#) and

Three: Getting Help for Your Child [🔗](#).

We also have Family Workshops available for a better understanding of mental health, depression and suicide. These free workshops are available on-demand:

Family Workshop I: We All Have Mental Health [🔗](#) and

Family Workshop II: Depression & Suicide [🔗](#).

Also check out our full suite of programs, resources and activities available for families at <https://erikaslighthouse.org/programs/family-engagement>.

Support Our Work

Erika's Lighthouse provides free, donor-funded programs and resources to school communities around the world. Our work, to revolutionize how schools approach mental health, is only possible because of individuals like you financially supporting our work. Join us today at <https://erikaslighthouse.org/donate-now> [🔗](#).





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